



STAYING IN THE GAME

Sustaining Meaningful Legal Careers

Assoc Prof (Dr) Tan Seow Hon & Ms Lim Su Ching

CONTENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

COACHING REPORT



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

“STAYING IN THE GAME” EMPIRICAL STUDY

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1. **Introduction:** This short-term pilot empirical study (“the Study”) was supported by a research grant from the Singapore Academy of Law and awarded to the Principal Investigator (“PI”), Assoc Prof Tan Seow Hon, Singapore Management University. The Study was designed to examine the value of helping lawyers to connect their work to what they regard as meaningful. For this Study, the PI and the Research Team Member Lim Su Ching (“the Coach”, and together, “the Team”) jointly designed a four-month program, running from 24 January to 23 May 2026, to guide lawyers to clarify what gives their work meaning or their purpose for working as a lawyer, and to actualize it by navigating around obstacles that hinder them day-to-day. At the end of the program, a retrospective pre-post self-evaluation questionnaire (the “Questionnaire”) was administered. The Study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). This Report complies with the guidelines for the project approved by the IRB.
2. **Facet of Problem of Attrition – Lack of Meaning at Work/Purpose for Work:** Lawyers leave legal practice for varied reasons, which may be cumulative. Many of these reasons can only be addressed at the institutional-, industry-, or firm-levels. One reason for the attrition of junior lawyers might be the lawyers’ perceived inability to do what they find meaningful. If so, guiding them towards actualizing meaning can lead to a greater sense of sustainability. Addressing the perceived or felt inability of lawyers to do what they find meaningful at work or their lack of purpose for staying as a lawyer is complementary to changes at other levels. It is also valuable for several reasons. First, changes at those levels take time to be felt on the ground; second, the legal profession should have a strong sense of vocation, which comes from individual lawyers having clarity about doing meaningful work; third, Gen Zs and millennials are greatly interested in meaning and purpose. We sought therefore to guide lawyers to clarify what gives their work meaning or their purpose for working as a lawyer, and to actualize this by identifying obstacles and hindrances to working meaningfully and navigating around these obstacles and hindrances.
3. **Link with Sustainability:** Even as having meaning at work and/or non-work-related purposes for working as lawyers contribute to lawyers staying in the game (that is, meaning/purpose contributes to sustainability), basic sustainability of work must be present before lawyers can work meaningfully (that is, sustainability is a pre-condition to working meaningfully). Some participants seeking to actualize meaning/purpose would, therefore, quite understandably identify obstacles and hindrances to working sustainably as a step towards working meaningfully. As the program began by guiding them to awareness of meaning/purpose, their overall aim would still be to navigate obstacles and hindrances to actualize meaning.
4. **Cohort:** A cohort of 21 participants with up to 10 years’ post-qualifying experience (“PQE”) completed the program. They were recruited via a general call issued by SAL and selected by the PI and the Coach based on their fit for the program and to ensure a cross-sectional spread of participants (*Table 1*). An important observation is that close to half of the cohort had various family responsibilities apart from their responsibilities at work.
5. **Elements of program:** The program consisted of group sessions, namely, a full-day “Retreat”, and two half-day “Learning Labs”, supported by individual personalized coaching sessions, and implementation of personalized action steps by the participants over two months. Panels of exemplars of vocation as well as of contemporaries who were willing to speak on challenges at similar phases of their career were invited to share with the participants. Participants were encouraged to share in individual journals which were accessible by the PI and the Coach to report on their wins and how they might have done better.

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
PQE	6 years or less	8 (38.1)
	7–10 years	13 (61.9)
Firm type	Local	18 (85.7)
	Foreign	3 (14.3)
Firm size	Small (1–5 lawyers)	6 (28.6)
	Medium (6–30 lawyers)	8 (38.1)
	Large (more than 30 lawyers)	4 (19.0)
	Big Four ¹	3 (14.3)
Practice areas	Competition & anti-trust	1 (4.8)
	Construction & infrastructure	2 (9.5)
	Corporate & commercial	9 (42.9)
	Criminal law	3 (14.3)
	Data protection & technology	4 (19.0)
	Dispute resolution & litigation	14 (66.7)
	Employment/labor law	1 (4.8)
	Family	6 (28.6)
	Insolvency	3 (14.3)
	Intellectual property	4 (19.0)
	International arbitration	1 (4.8)
	Private wealth	1 (4.8)
	Probate & succession planning	4 (19.0)
	Real estate	2 (9.5)
	Tax	1 (4.8)
Family responsibilities	Parent or parent-to-be	4 (19.0)
	With aged parents and/or family members (other than one's own children) to care for	5 (23.8)
	Parent or parent-to-be, with aged parents and/or family members (other than one's own children) to care for	1 (4.8)

Table 1: Profile of participants. Note. Percentages are based on N=21 and reported to one decimal place. Percentages do not sum to 100 as participants may report more than one practice area, and not every participant reported family responsibilities.

¹ The Big Four firms in Singapore refer to Allen & Gledhill LLP, Drew & Napier LLC, Rajah & Tann LLP, and Wong Partnership.

6. **Framework, personalized coaching, and implementation of action steps:** The lawyers were provided with a framework to enable their sustainable navigation of meaning and purpose at work. They were supported by personalized coaching sessions. Implementation of personalized self-selected action steps over two months followed.
 - (i) **Meaning and purpose:** The participants were guided to reflect on their philosophies of life and of work and who they were (personality, talents, experiences, context, etc.). These were handles to clarify what gave them meaning at work and/or their non-work-related purpose for working as a lawyer. *Meaning at work* relates to meaning *intrinsic to the work* a lawyer does. Intrinsic meaning may be outward-looking, such as providing clients with practical solutions, or inward-looking, such as self-actualization by honing one's own craft. *Non-work-related purposes for working* encapsulate reasons for working that are *extrinsic to the lawyer's work*, such as providing for one's family or earning a keep to do what one enjoys. Having either may help lawyers to feel their career is sustainable, though some may need to find meaning at work, and not just a non-work-related purpose for working as a lawyer. The first coaching session supported them in identifying their meaning/purpose.
 - (ii) **Obstacles and hindrances/Posture-shifts and micro-actions:** The participants were guided on obstacles and hindrances ("O&H") that stood in the way of working meaningfully, categorized into four groups: not knowing how to do what was meaningful; self-limitations (e.g. sense of inadequacy and putting oneself down); external limitations (e.g. work deadlines); or real immovables for now (e.g. demands on one's time because of the familial responsibilities at a life-stage). What seems to be an O&H may not be so or may be navigated astutely – something to be uncovered during coaching. For instance, a sense of inadequacy about interacting with clients may stem from a negative deep-seated belief from one's earlier experiences, but one might in fact grow in one's ability to interact and overcome what seemed to be a lack of ability. Or a tough pace of work might be magnified by one's competitive nature and one's imposition of unrealistic expectations on oneself. Upon identifying their O&H, the participants were tasked with discovering, with the support of personalized coaching, helpful "posture-shifts" and "micro-actions" ("PS&MA") that could enable them to navigate around their O&H to working with meaning/purpose. Posture-shifts are shifts in mindset, attitude, or belief systems that make a difference to one's perspectives of one's encounters. Micro-actions are small, actionable, concrete changes that make a difference to one's life, particularly when they are consistently adopted and have a compounding effect over time. The second coaching session addressed their O&H and their selected PS&MA to be implemented over two months. At the midpoint of implementation, the third coaching session was conducted to assist in accountability and refinement for the way forward.
7. **Ground rules and activities:** Community-building and the space for vulnerable and authentic sharing were facilitated intentionally by activities. The ground rules for interaction encouraged the participants to give themselves the space for discovering surprising insights, to choose not to feel inferior or superior to others, to hold space for others, to build others up, to protect matters shared in confidence, and to refrain from being judgmental.
8. **The coaching journey:** The Coaching Report authored by the Coach sets out the process of the coaching and the themes that emerged in relation to the participants' philosophy of life, philosophy of work, what was meaningful, obstacles and hindrances to actualizing meaning at work, posture-shifts they adopted, and micro-actions they implemented. The coaching journey was crucial for uncovering these, for self-awareness, and to assist participants in their implementation over two months.

9. **Impact of program on philosophies, purpose, and meaning:** Table 2a shows a marked shift in clarity amongst the participants about *their* philosophies of life and of work and the interconnection, and what *they* find meaningful to do at work. All three items were rated in the Top-2 in a 5-point Clarity-scale by more than 80% of the participants post-program. The elements of the program most frequently selected as helpful to clarify these were coaching, sharing by the Team, intentionality at implementation/awareness, and individual reflection (Table 2b). The newfound clarity provided direction in practical ways that enhanced the experience of work. It resolved for several participants what they valued and therefore chose to do, even if their choices were not strongly aligned in the short-term with organizational key performance indicators (KPIs). For instance, one might accept a trade-off in efficiency by spending time mentoring juniors because it was personally meaningful. The themes in relation to what constituted a life well-lived for some participants, identified in the Coaching Report, were relationships, contribution to and serving others, achievement and self-direction, and being true to one's personal belief system. For their philosophy of work, themes reflected amongst some participants included work being service and contribution; work as craft; work for mentoring and relationships; work predominantly as means to other ends; and work as a domain for living out one's values and experiencing character growth.

Clarity regarding	Time	Top-2 n (%)
Philosophy of life, philosophy of work & their interconnection	Pre-program	4 (19.0)
	Post-program	18 (85.7)
Purpose for working as a lawyer	Pre-program	6 (28.6)
	Post-program	17 (81.0)
What participants find meaningful to do at work	Pre-program	4 (19.0)
	Post-program	17 (81.0)

Table 2a: Clarity regarding philosophies, purpose, and meaning pre- and post-program. Note. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not clear at all*) to 5 (*extremely clear*). "Top-2" comprises ratings of 4 or 5. Purpose for working as a lawyer included purposes derived from outside work and purposes based on meaning experienced at work.

Program element	n	%
Coaching	20	95.2
Sharing by the Team	18	85.7
Intentional implementation and heightened awareness	17	81.0
Individual reflection	17	81.0

Table 2b: Most helpful program elements for clarity on philosophies, purpose, and meaning. Note. N=21.

10. **Impact of program on obstacles and hindrances:** Table 3a shows the pre- and post-program awareness of O&H that stood in the ways of a *sustainable legal career* and of *doing what they found meaningful at work*. There was a substantial increase in the number of participants with clarity about both kinds of O&H through the program. The most frequently selected program elements viewed as helpful on this were coaching, the Team's sharing, and individual reflection (Table 3b). The Coaching Report identified the following O&H: perfectionism and unrealistic expectations; self-worth and self-perception; emotions and avoidance; navigation of others; boundaries and time-management; and lack of role models who work sustainably. Some participants expressed relief that they received illumination on the O&H and which were within their circle of control, and further, that their commitment in the program motivated them to work around these O&H.

Clarity regarding	Time	Top-2 n (%)
O&H to a sustainable legal career	Pre-program	6 (28.6)
	Post-program	20 (95.2)
O&H to doing what participants find meaningful at work	Pre-program	4 (19.0)
	Post-program	17 (81.0)

Table 3a: Clarity regarding obstacles and hindrances pre- and post-program. Note. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not clear at all) to 5 (extremely clear). “Top-2” comprises ratings of 4 or 5.

Program element	n	%
Coaching	20	95.2
Sharing by the Team	18	85.7
Individual reflection	14	66.7

Table 3b: Most helpful program elements for clarity on O&H. Note. N=21.

11. **Impact of program on PS&MA:** Only one participant was aware of such notions pre-program. There was a marked shift to 100% for the “Top-2” ratings on awareness post-program (Table 4a). The most frequently selected elements of the program helpful for this were coaching, individual reflection, and the Team’s sharing (Table 4b). The Coaching Report indicated posture-shifts such as turning from perfectionism to granting oneself permission (e.g. to rest, to accept messiness of life); from wrestling to an acceptance of oneself; from an inward focus to serving others; and from passivity and dependence on circumstances to ownership. The Coaching Report noted that micro-actions included building new habits by starting small (e.g. using a “Pomodoro timer”), adopting a new inner script to replace a negative inner voice, using pauses to change their habitual responses to triggers, boundaries such as turning notifications on devices off, and new rhythms.

Table 4c shows the participants’ self-evaluation of their consistency and success in their commitment to PS&MA over two months. 12 participants classified their chosen PS&MA as related to making work both meaningful and sustainable, 8 classified theirs as related to making work sustainable only, and one participant classified theirs as related to making work meaningful only. Table 4d takes into account the fact that 20 participants saw their PS&MA as relating to sustainability (N=20), and 13 to meaning (N=13): 16 of the 20 reported positive results on sustainability, while 9 out of 13 reported positive results on meaning.

Awareness about	Time	Top-2 n (%)
Posture-shifts & micro-actions	Pre-program	1 (4.8)
	Post-program	21 (100.0)

Table 4a: Awareness about posture-shifts and micro-actions pre- and post-program. Note. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not aware at all) to 5 (keenly aware). “Top-2” comprises ratings of 4 or 5.

Program element	n	%
Coaching	18	85.7
Individual reflection	13	61.9
Sharing by the Team	12	57.1

Table 4b: Most helpful program elements for awareness about PS&MA. Note. N=21.

Self-evaluation of attempt to adopt a posture-shift or implement a micro-action	Top-2 n (%)
Consistency	13 (61.9)
Success	16 (76.2)

Table 4c: Consistency and success in trying to adopt a posture-shift or implement a micro-action. Note. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = not at all consistent/successful to 5 = very consistent/successful. "Top-2" comprises ratings of 4 or 5.

Successfully adopting a posture-shift or implementing a micro-action helped me to feel that	Top-2 n (%)
My legal career was more sustainable (N=20)	16 (80.0)
My work overall was more meaningful (N=13)	9 (69.2)

Table 4d: Success in PS&MA and sustainability/meaningfulness. Note. Participants were told to skip this question if they were entirely unsuccessful. N for each item takes into account the classification of the participants as to whether their PS&MA related to sustainability and/or meaning. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. "Top-2" comprises ratings of 4 or 5.

12. **Insight into meaning at work, purpose for working as a lawyer, and sustainability:** The program's impact should not be assessed by how many decided to stay in private practice by the end of the program.

For instance, someone who finds practice unsustainable and lacks meaning at work may stay for a long time for other reasons (such as having a mortgage to pay, inertia, fear of change, not knowing what else to do, and family pressure), even if the person thinks sustainability and meaning are important.

Conversely, someone who has discovered meaning at work and finds it sustainable may leave because of unrelated factors (such as experiencing a personal calling to do something entirely different).

What is more important is whether the participants regarded meaning at work, purpose for working as a lawyer, and sustainability as important factors that help them to stay in private practice: if so, all things being equal, the presence of these factors would give them reasons to stay.

From *Table 5*, finding meaning at work would give 18 participants a reason to stay. 6 persons did not rate "Top-2" on finding meaning at work currently, and for 5 of them, when the results were individually correlated, being able to do what was meaningful at work would help them to stay in the game. For these 5 participants, none of them had decided or were contemplating staying in private practice for the next 3 years: some were considering their options while others had decided to, or were thinking of, leaving private practice for other law-related careers.

Another interesting finding was that 19 participants regarded sustainability (apart from factors related to meaningfulness) as a topmost consideration whether they chose to stay, suggesting that ensuring basic sustainability should be a priority of firms and the industry. Also interestingly, 3 of these participants rated only "3" in a 5-point scale (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) for their current sustainability, and having rated "Top-2" for having meaning at work as well as non-work-related purposes, all 3 had decided or were contemplating staying in private practice for the next 3 years. The neutral rating on current sustainability did not tip the scale where meaning was present.

Participants' self-evaluation	Top-2 n (%)
Having a purpose for working helps me to stay in the game.	20 (95.2)
Being able to do what I find meaningful at the workplace helps me to stay in the game, and it is not enough that I have some other non-work-related purpose.	18 (85.7)
Sustainability of work, apart from factors related to meaningfulness of work, is one of my topmost considerations in whether I stay in the game.	19 (90.5)
Currently, I have a non-work-related purpose for working as a lawyer.	14 (66.7)
Currently, I am able to do what I find meaningful at the workplace.	15 (71.4)
Currently, I find work sustainable.	12 (57.1)

Table 5: *Having purpose for working, meaning at work, and sustainability.* Note. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. "Top-2" comprises ratings of 4 or 5. Purpose for working includes meaning at work and non-work-related purposes.

13. Outcomes of program

(i) *Sense of growth and/or wellbeing:* Table 6 shows that the participants unanimously thought that being on the program facilitated their *sense of growth and/or wellbeing*. They appreciated the space and chance to gain "new perspectives", "process" and "consolidate" their thoughts, "recalibrate", realize the importance of meaning, think about what they valued and seek to find meaning in work, course-correct, be more intentional about priorities, and, generally, gain self-awareness.

(ii) *Tangible individual gains and practical benefits:* All but one participant agreed or strongly agreed that their participation helped them to take *practical steps towards sustainable legal careers* and also that they were now able to identify obstacles and hindrances and formulate practical strategies, such as PS&MA, for the way forward. A strong majority also thought that their participation assisted them in taking specific steps towards doing some things which they found meaningful at work. Prior to the program, some had a gnawing sense of something being amiss but could not name the problems. Work might have been drudgery, but no framework was available for them to think about how to find meaning in the assignments at work. *The specific practical benefits identified by participants included being equipped with a framework to discern what was meaningful for them; being able to strategize and chart the plans for what they needed to do; knowing what to do with O&H; being clearer about the way forward for their career; ordering their priorities and doing some things differently so as to thrive instead of burn-out; and figuring out what steps they need to do to make their legal practice sustainable.* There was also relief about how common their issues were, a sense gained during group sharing as well as from the panels of exemplars and of contemporaries. They learnt that grappling with difficulties was part of the journey of learning and growth and did not necessarily indicate unsuitability for legal practice. For some, legal practice received a new lease of life.

Outcomes	Top-2 n (%)
Overall, being on the program facilitated my sense of growth and/or wellbeing.	21 (100.0)
Overall, I sense I am now able to identify obstacles and hindrances, and formulate some practical strategies, such as posture-shifts and micro-actions, for moving forward.	20 (95.2)
Overall, being on the program helped me to take concrete steps towards a sustainable legal career.	20 (95.2)

Outcomes	Top-2 n (%)
Overall, being on the program helped me to take concrete steps towards doing some things which I find meaningful at work.	15 (71.4)

Table 6: Overall benefits of program. Not. N=21. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. "Top-2" comprises ratings of 4 or 5.

14. **Community:** Participants also appreciated community and the opportunity to meet other lawyers and to hear others share vulnerably in a context outside of work, which opened their eyes to other qualities in their contemporaries not apparent in the work context. After the formal program for the Retreat and the second Learning Lab was over, many of the lawyers stayed back to chat at length with one another, showing how much the interactions were appreciated even though these sessions occurred on Saturdays.

15. **Conclusion:** With the caveat that the cohort was small and the sample may be self-selecting to some degree, the Study showed that our participant lawyers were of the view that finding meaning at work helped them to stay in the game, but that basic sustainability should be ensured at the industry- or firm-level, because it is a topmost consideration of the lawyers. While this might seem to be evident without the need for an empirical study, the more significant insight from the Study, given the attrition problem in the legal profession and if the cohort's response is indicative, is that there are lawyers who can benefit from external assistance to gain clarity on what gives meaning at work, what purpose they have for working as a lawyer, what obstacles and hindrances there might be to actualizing meaning/purpose at work or working sustainably, and how they could navigate around some of these by posture-shifts and micro-actions. Lawyers benefit from a program that gets them to reflect on these concepts and challenges them to actualize what they have uncovered, supported by coaching, and through intentional implementation. With systemic factors outside of the control of individuals, this boost to individual lawyers by empowering them to take ownership of what is within their circle of control might be modest in impact, but still valuable, not just for the longevity of the lawyers' careers but because the legal profession is stronger when it is composed of lawyers who work with a sense of vocation and purpose, who have the conviction that what they do is meaningful. Exemplars of vocation who can attest to the meaning of work can help to show the way. Meaning need not be framed in grand abstractions nor be heroic in scale: the identification of meaning can begin small and be found in the ordinary day-to-day, for instance, helping clients to solve problems, or bringing in business so that one's team has work to do and can earn their keep.

Second, the intrinsic meaning of work to lawyers – serving others, mentoring others – should be respected by firms. Space should be created in the lawyers' workdays for meaningful work. There should be a capacious vision of the workday that contributes to lawyers' sense of wellbeing and growth. Culture-building towards a more capacious vision of the workday depends on senior management moving with resolve towards a salutary ethos of encouraging good work and not being solely or excessively driven towards efficiency, productivity, and profit. It makes for sustainability of legal practice, contributes to productivity, and is cost-saving in the longer term.

Finally, understanding – reclaiming – vocation is important. Just as lawyers are expected to stay on top of their game by updating their knowledge of the law as part of continuing professional development ("CPD") requirements, empower lawyers with a sense of vocation. The Study showed that comprehension of what one values is not always intuitive to lawyers and that lawyers may have a sense of unhappiness with their work but be unable to pinpoint or name the obstacle or hindrance that stands in their way of meaningful, sustainable legal

careers. They may also lack the time to process what they have been going through. But they can be guided by instruction through toolkits, coaching, and commitments to actualize on a day-to-day basis what they have learnt. Accrediting CPD points for such programs, even having law firms sponsor their lawyers for such programs just as they are willing to invest in their lawyers' upgrading of technical competencies, are tangible steps that signal unequivocally the legal profession's reorientation to its purpose in society – and in the lives of its members, whose thriving in their vocation strengthens the legal profession as a whole.

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Helping Lawyers to Stay in the Game

Meaning, Posture-shifts and Micro-actions

A Coaching Report

Findings from the empirical study, *Staying in the Game*, a collaboration between the Singapore Academy of Law and Yong Pung How School of Law, Singapore Management University

Lim Su Ching

Elevate Life Coaching

July 2026

Table of Contents

I.	<i>Executive Summary</i>	<i>3</i>
II.	<i>The Cohort, Programme and Coaching Methodology.....</i>	<i>5</i>
III.	<i>Philosophy of Life – How Lawyers Understood a Life Well-lived</i>	<i>7</i>
IV.	<i>Philosophy of Work – Why Lawyers Want to Work</i>	<i>10</i>
V.	<i>What Gets in the Way – Obstacles and Hindrances</i>	<i>14</i>
VI.	<i>Posture-Shifts Matter</i>	<i>17</i>
VII.	<i>Role of Micro-Actions</i>	<i>19</i>
VIII.	<i>Programme’s Reception and Impact of Coaching</i>	<i>20</i>
IX.	<i>Some Coaching Insights</i>	<i>22</i>
X.	<i>Key Recommendations</i>	<i>23</i>
XI.	<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>26</i>

I. Executive Summary

1. **Pilot Project.** This is a report (“Coaching Report”) authored by Ms Lim Su Ching (“the Coach”), founder of Elevate Life Coaching, pursuant to the programme designed for the empirical study, *Staying in the Game*, supported by a research grant awarded by the Singapore Academy of Law (“SAL”) to the Principal Investigator, Assoc Prof Tan Seow Hon, Yong Pung How School of Law, Singapore Management University. The programme for the study was jointly designed by the Principal Investigator and the Coach, who together formed the Research Team for this first-of-its-kind project combining group workshops, personalised coaching, individual 8-week implementation phase, and an empirical research study.
2. **Candid Views of 21 Young Lawyers.** The candid reflections set out in this Coaching Report offer a rare glimpse into the lives of 21 young lawyers who were genuinely seeking personal solutions to a more sustainable way of practising law. The participants were recruited through an open call and selected to represent a cross-section of seniority (of up to 10 years PQE), practice area, firm size and gender. For the purposes of this Coaching Report, some of the quotations and information have been disguised to comply with the protocol of the Institutional Review Board for this empirical study that participants not be identifiable.
3. **Meaning.** The findings across the cohort show that these participants found meaning in life from relationships and family, contributing to the lives of others, personal achievement and self-direction, and a personal belief system. At work, meaning is derived from service to clients, the intellectual rigour of their craft and mentoring others. Character development and the ability to live out one’s values at work are also embedded in meaning. These sources of meaning apply even to those who view work as primarily a means to an end.
4. **What Lawyers Want.** There is tension in actualising meaning in practice. Lawyers spend so much time at work that they have little time and little of themselves left to give to the very relationships that bring them their deepest meaning. The coaching conversations reveal a deep desire not just to cope, but to manage well the competing demands in their lives. The ability of lawyers to do well at work and still manage well their lives, time and priorities is what makes their work sustainable. However, these convictions do not always translate into practice. Some things stand in the way.
5. **Obstacles.** The obstacles focused on were, by the programme’s deliberate design, those within each lawyer’s own circle of control. The most commonly named obstacle was perfectionism and unrealistic expectations. What helps these lawyers

succeed can also turn out to be the very thing that strains them viz. their internal drive towards excellence. These unrealistic expectations of themselves are not confined to work but extend to other roles in life. The next most frequently cited obstacle is the inner critic. From a coaching perspective, this appears to reflect their legal skill of critique, exercised daily in court and on contracts, turned inwards towards the self. The other obstacles are: emotions and avoidance, navigation of others, unguarded boundaries, and the absence of role models who practice sustainably.

6. **Posture-Shift and Micro-Action.** The coaching worked beneath the named obstacles to locate a posture-shift that would enable these lawyers to better navigate the obstacles they are facing. As the most effective posture-shift is not prescribed but discovered and articulated by the individual, the coaching process focused on helping participants come to this self-realisation. Each posture-shift was grounded in what is deeply meaningful to the participants, and notably, the shifts that held most firmly were anchored in identity. Participants then translated their shifts into small, repeatable micro-actions, that helped to reinforce the posture-shift.
7. **Reception.** The programme was very well received. Participants reported very strong overall programme outcomes and that coaching was critical to their progress. Whilst coaching was the most frequently cited programme component for what helped the participants, the broader programme design, a collaboration between the Principal Investigator and the Coach, was integral to its effectiveness.
8. **Recommendations.** If there is one overarching lesson from the coaching conversations, it is that a meaningful and sustainable legal practice does not rest solely on an individual endeavour nor solely on an institutional one. It requires the support of an entire legal ecosystem. At the individual level, coaching can help lawyers to better understand themselves, their work and their circumstances. In the process, they learn to identify obstacles and to carry out posture-shifts. At the institutional level, firms and the wider profession should create the margins necessary for sustainable practice, foster communities where lawyers feel a sense of belonging, have a shared purpose, can speak candidly and support one another, and make visible the exemplars who model sustainable practice. Together, these recommendations seek to cultivate a profession in which lawyers can flourish in doing meaningful work.
9. **The Nemo Dat Rule.** One participant named what all this empirical data points to: *“There is a deep-soul tiredness in us”*. As every lawyer would know *“nemo dat quod non habet”* – we cannot give of what we do not have. As it is in the law, so it is in life. A sustainable legal practice requires that lawyers have space to be filled, in order to give. The question, then, is this : What fills your cup?

II. The Cohort, Programme and Coaching Methodology

Cohort Selection and Representation

10. Participants for this pilot study were recruited through an open call issued by the SAL, and selected to represent a cross-section of the legal profession, encompassing young lawyers across varying levels of PQE (within the band of up to 10 years PQE), different practice areas, firms ranging from small practices to the Big Four, local and international practices, and a balanced representation of men and women.

Coaching Design

11. Each of the 21 participating lawyers¹ received three individual coaching sessions over a four-month period as part of a broader programme that was co-designed by the Principal Investigator and the author, a research team member and coach who had 20 years of legal practice experience. The programme included content delivery during a full-day Retreat and two half-day Learnings Labs, which also included facilitated panel sharing, structured reflection exercises and group discussions. The coaching sessions progressed as follow:
- a. Session 1 was designed to surface each participant's philosophy of life and philosophy of work and build upon the reflective work already done during the full-day Retreat.
 - b. Session 2 built upon the content of the first Learning Lab and focused on helping the participant personalise a “micro-action” and “posture-shift” in order to overcome an obstacle towards a more meaningful or sustainable legal practice.
 - c. Session 3 was a midpoint check-in during their 8-week implementation phase to see if recalibrations of the “micro-action” or “posture-shift” were necessary, and the steps to be taken if they were.

Coaching Methodology : Objective, Obstacle, Posture-Shift, Micro-action

12. The conceptual foundations for this programme were jointly developed by the Principal Investigator and the Coach at the outset. This consisted what participants found meaningful in life and at work, obstacles and hindrances towards actualising meaning in the day-to-day, behavioural change through posture-shifts and micro-actions, and reflective practice. Building on these concepts, the Coach developed the coaching framework for facilitating sustained change using these elements.

¹ None of the participants are known to the Coach prior to this programme.

13. Each participant worked through a four-step arc – Objective, Obstacle, Posture-Shift, Micro-action. A participant first names an “objective” that would make their work more meaningful, more sustainable, or both. Next, an “obstacle” to that objective would be identified that was within their own circle of control. Getting past this obstacle required not merely action, but one that was rooted in a “posture-shift” – a change in the participant’s underlying disposition, belief or default way of viewing the obstacle in the first place. Once that shift was identified, it was translated into a small, repeatable “micro-action” that was easy and sufficiently practical for the participant to implement consistently in their lives.
14. The methodology draws from Viktor Frankl’s insight² that the human search for meaning, the “will to meaning”, is a primary motivational force and an important determinant of resilience, well-being and fulfilment. He believed that individuals are driven by a need to find purpose, even in suffering, and that life holds meaning under all conditions. Consistent with this insight, the coaching process began not with making work more efficient, time management strategies or career direction, but with deeper questions concerning participants’ philosophy of life, philosophy of work, and what they found meaningful in their professional practice.
15. Second, the methodology draws inspiration from BJ Fogg’s Behaviour Model and Tiny Habits framework³. Fogg’s central observation is that most well-intentioned behavioural commitments fail not because of insufficient motivation but because the actions are not small or simple enough to be executed consistently⁴. Rather than encouraging participants to pursue major life changes, the coaching process focused on identifying “micro-actions” that could realistically be implemented within the realities of legal practice.
16. Third, and most distinctively, the methodology incorporates the concept of a posture-shift. This is a shift in the individual’s underlying disposition, inner attitude or beliefs. Participants were therefore encouraged not merely to identify actions but also to examine the beliefs, narratives and default responses that caused them to be “stuck” in the first place. The most effective posture-shift is not prescribed but discovered and articulated by the individuals themselves. The coaching process therefore focused on facilitating self-realisation. Rather than prescribing solutions, the coaching conversations helped participants arrive at a shift in posture that enabled them to see themselves, their work, and their circumstances from a different

² Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press. (Original work published 1946)

³ Fogg, B. J. (2019). *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

⁴ This insight has also influenced subsequent work in the field of habit formation, including James Clear’s “Atomic Habits” (2018), which explicitly acknowledges and builds upon Fogg’s earlier research on behaviour design.

perspective. It was this shift that unlocked forward movement towards their objective.

III. Philosophy of Life – How Lawyers Understood a Life Well-lived

17. The first coaching session was structured around two fundamental questions aimed at unpacking one's philosophy of life and philosophy of work.

“What is a life well-lived?”

“Why do you work?”

18. These important questions are seemingly simple, yet rarely given sustained attention in the lives of busy legal professionals. The programme was therefore designed to create the space to help the participants sit with these questions and draw out their answers to them. The participants were also asked to consider the interplay between their philosophies, the extent to which they were aligned and, if not, whether their philosophy of life or their philosophy of work took the lead in their lives.
19. Being able to identify what gives one's life and work meaning is only the first step. Equally important is being able to hold that meaning in view, particularly when work becomes challenging. It is this enduring sense of meaning that gives a person the conviction to weather the difficulties in life and work.
20. Four themes emerged from the cohort's response to the question of what constitutes a life well-lived. The themes were not mutually exclusive. Every participant was represented by at least one theme, but only a small number mapped cleanly onto a single theme. Most (16 of the 21 participants) exhibited two or more themes. This is unsurprising, as people rarely derive meaning from a single source but an interplay of multiple sources simultaneously. The themes are presented here with illustrative quotations⁵ drawn from the participants' articulated philosophies of life expressed in their coaching sessions.

Note: Reflecting the interplay described above, quotations frequently span more than one theme and are offered as an illustration of the theme under which it appears, not as belonging exclusively to that theme.

⁵To ensure compliance with the Independent Review Board's requirement for aggregate-level, anonymised reporting, this Coaching Report omits participant numbers or any consistent identifier from quotations.

Theme 1 : Relationships at the Centre (17 of 21)

21. The most consistent and dominant theme across the entire group was the centrality of relationships as a measure of a meaningful life. For most of the participants, a life well-lived is measured through relationships with family above all, as well as friends, colleagues and community. What counted was the quality of connection with those who matter, time to be fully present with them, and shaping the next generation through their good conduct and role-modelling. This theme also carries the cohort's most openly expressed regret – one participant acknowledged not having been able to be a good friend or family member because work kept them from being present.

“I would like to be able to spend my life with the people I love and be remembered as someone who did my best for my family, loved ones and what I cared about. My legacy is to leave behind children who are good people.”

“People and relationships. Rich in having lots of people come in and out of my life.”

“To bring joy to the people around me and to be a good person.”

“Be around for [child/children⁶] and do my best for them including being a good role model. Having no regrets. Leading a fulfilling life.”

“To help someone and do good. To use my skills to help people. To raise a happy family. To be able to know that I am influencing people through the way I am leading my life.”

“In my 20s, I wanted to create a splash. Now in my 30s, it is protecting and providing for those closest to me.”

Theme 2: Contribution and service to others (13 of 21)

22. A second distinct theme was contribution and service to others. Over half of the participants locate meaning in leaving people, or the world better off. They framed their lives in terms of an obligation to serve someone or something beyond themselves i.e. an obligation that is owed outward. They saw their lives as being led in service of their loved ones and for the common good. This is different from relational orientation because it involves a sense of purpose or calling about how they want to use their skills and talents.

“I feel a deep responsibility to those around me, not to be self-seeking but to do things that brings value and move others towards the common good.”

⁶ This comment has been made by a current or aspiring parent.

“My philosophy of life is to leave a mark and leave this place better – that the world is in a better place because of what I have done.”

“Live to fulfil my duty to family, people around me and my country.”

“Epitome is to really give back in a philanthropic sense and at bare minimum - you do not hinder people.”

Theme 3: Achievement and Self-direction (8 of 21)

23. A life well lived for roughly a third of the cohort is one of achievement and self-direction. This is a focus on becoming the fullest and most complete version of oneself, and having the autonomy to do so. A life well-lived, on this view, has a more internal orientation than the second theme, though for several participants this orientation also co-existed with a genuine commitment to contributing to others and the world around them.

“Chasing opportunities and living a life of always being a go-getter.”

“Live life without any regrets - done all I can do to achieve all that I can achieve in this life, feel satisfied with my life.”

“Experience life as fully as I can - immersing myself in the things and doing them completely. Meaningful relationships are also important.”

“Being there for family and friends, and pouring my life into a specific skill that I can control.”

“To be known as kind and brave, and being better than the day before.”

“Freedom to do what I want to do and to get to do things well and do a good job out of it.”

Theme 4: Personal Belief System (8 of 21)

24. A personal belief system provided the primary framework through which nearly another third of the cohort understood a life well-lived. These participants prized living in accordance with their foundational beliefs and values, which were religious in nature. This realisation that their religious values were foundational was surprising for one participant. For several of them, the desire to steward their talents well, care appropriately for others, or contribute to the common good, were not abstract values but expressions of a coherent worldview that gave those commitments their weight and durability. In their own words:

"My philosophy of life is shaped by my belief in life — living for others and living for God."

Some Points of Interest on the Philosophy of Life

25. **Legacy.** There is a divergence when it comes to legacy. Some want to leave a mark, whether this be *"a better world"*, *"a book or painting"*, *"good children"*. However, others explicitly disclaim it: *"I don't think I need to be remembered"*, and *"I am not fussed about leaving a legacy because I feel I have nothing to contribute, teach and pass on"*.
26. **Simple Life.** A small minority voiced their desire to live simply and with contentment as a counter measure to professional striving. A few participants used the same phrase independently: to *"lead a simple life."* One was explicit that they did not want to be *"caught up in living the high life"*. Another described wanting *"to be authentic and true to self,"* and to *"feel satisfied"* with their life, without needing to be better than other lawyers or to accumulate beyond what was sufficient. This is interesting because these lawyers are working in environments that are generally oriented toward accumulation and status, so this philosophy cuts against how they would like to live and may cause some dissonance for them.

IV. Philosophy of Work – How Lawyers View Work

27. In so far as their philosophy of work is concerned, five themes emerged, with 18 of the 21 participants mapping clearly to two or more themes. This time, the supporting quotations from the participants are not just taken from the coaching sessions, but also an post-programme questionnaire where they were asked to *"Write a short statement about your purpose for working and what you find meaningful to do at the workplace."*

Theme 1: Work as Service and Contribution (14 of 21)

28. Work as service and contribution was the most widespread work theme, mirroring the life philosophy of contribution and service to others. These participants viewed their work as a vehicle to use their legal skills to help others, solve problems and deliver value.

"Being a problem solver. I find meaning in helping clients navigate the difficulties of the legal system and bringing clarity to them. Law is a tool to help especially for those who cannot afford lawyers and is a tool for problem solving"

"I find my work meaningful as I am able to assist clients navigate a difficult phase in their lives and de-escalate acrimony between parties."

"I see my work as enriching people with legal knowledge to provide a win-win solution."

"Good work is its own reward and any work I choose to put my time in should make a difference to the people out there."

"My purpose [for working] is to grow myself, such that I may in turn nourish others. I find it meaningful to keep intellectually growing at my workplace."

Theme 2: Work as Craft (12 of 21)

29. A large majority of the participants found meaning in the craft of lawyering and the discipline of doing it well. They enjoy the intellectual rigour of crafting submissions, solving a complex legal issue and the satisfaction of producing excellent work. This is a more intrinsic source of meaning and it functions as a source of meaning even for lawyers whose life philosophy is oriented outward.

"My purpose for working is to hone my craft in lawyering. Refining my craft and being 1% better than I was yesterday makes lawyering meaningful for me."

"I want to do good work that fulfils my internal standard and be a mentor to my juniors so that they know work doesn't have to be a tedious drudgery."

"What I find meaningful at work is developing my craft, and to a lesser extent, growing with my colleagues."

"My purpose for working is to be able to do something meaningful and productive with my talent and skills and to bring glory to God in what I do, and over time, getting better in my craft."

Theme 3: Work as Mentorship and Relationship (11 of 21)

30. Slightly more than half of the participants also find meaning in their work relationships. They enjoy the simple companionship of thinking through problems together, and in particular developing those junior to them. One participant described making a conscious effort to buffer their junior colleagues from weekend work generated by urgent requests, often choosing to absorb those demands personally so that their juniors could have more uninterrupted time to rest and recover. A number of participants also recognised that the pressures of legal practice extend beyond lawyers to their support staff. They spoke of making a conscious effort to create a safe working environment for their staff and to *"brightening the day"* for their

secretaries. For several participants, this is the most meaningful element of their working life and notably, it sustains even those who otherwise treat work instrumentally.

“Work is my contribution to community. I find it meaningful to build relationships with my colleagues and clients.”

“It brings meaning when I am able to bring comfort to my clients in helping them solve their legal problems, when I am able to provide a safe working environment in the office for the staff where they can earn their keep and go home to their personal lives after.”

“Work funds the things in life that brings me joy and fulfilment. At the same time, [doing complex legal work and seeing them through to completion], as well as mentoring juniors / helping juniors to “have it a bit easier” are things that allow me to find work meaningful.”

Theme 4: Work as Predominantly a Means to an End (9 of 21)

31. Not every participant finds meaning or delight in the craft of lawyering. For nearly half of the cohort, work is predominantly instrumental – a way to provide for loved ones, meet obligations or fund a life whose meaning lies elsewhere, whether in their relationships, hobbies or pursuits outside of their work. One of them sees work as a “necessary evil” and their honest answers reveal a disconnect between how they value life and how they value work.

“I see work as a necessary evil, as something I can do to hone a skill. Work allows me to live out my values, and gives me space to help people. I work to put money on the table – it is a means to an end.”

“Just to pay for bills. I do not really enjoy work. Huge disconnect about what I feel about life and what I feel about work.”

“Do my best and earn money to buy things I like.”

“My purpose at work is that I must provide for my family.”

32. The view that work is only a means to something else has important implications for the sustainability of a legal career. If work is reduced to something to endure in order to reach the “real” life outside it, then a large proportion of a lawyer’s life becomes an experience of meaningless hardship. As one of the panellists shared, when asked to advise a lawyer who viewed work as only a means to an end: “Your purpose is not

grand enough. This means that for more than half your life you will not be enjoying yourself. Work devoid of purpose becomes a chore and you will burn out.”.

33. What makes the panellist’s remark even more of a wake-up call is the stark reality of legal practice. The punishing nature of legal work is felt regardless of seniority and frequently extends beyond the formal office hours, so lawyers do not always get to keep their “real” life during the evenings or the weekends.

Theme 5: Work as a Domain to live out Values and for Character Growth (7 of 21)

34. A contrasting view emerged among other participants, who described work not as merely instrumental but as a domain in which their values are lived out and for them to grow as persons and in their character.

“Stewardship for purpose of helping people and upholding moral standards and work is a domain for you to live that out.”

35. Meaning lies not just in the work that is done, but also in how they work and in the kind of people they become through it. To work, on this view, is also an opportunity to embody kindness, diligence and integrity. They also viewed difficulty and the need to overcome what is hard to do at work as part and parcel of the worth of work. Rather than diminishing the value of work, struggle was understood to deepen its significance and as a crucible for personal growth.

“My purpose for working is to challenge myself intellectually and to grow as a person. At work I find it meaningful to help clients navigate their legal challenges while relating to them as people with complex circumstances.”

“Work, at its core, is stewardship. It is the disciplined use of our abilities in service of something beyond ourselves. I derive meaning in the workplace by exercising kindness, grace and decency to the people around me; and to apply myself with diligence and responsibility to get the job done.”

“Work will also be fundamentally thorny — work will be tough — I see a lot of virtue and beauty in that struggle, as only then does your harvest taste so sweet. So the fact that practice can be hard does not detract from it being fulfilling.”

V. What Stands in the Way – Obstacles and Hindrances

36. Having helped participants gain clarity on what gives their work and lives meaning through the first session of coaching, the focus of the second and third coaching sessions turned to helping them unpack and overcome what stands between that meaning and their daily reality.
37. In order to do this, we looked to each participant's **most immediate objective** at their workplace by asking them to: identify one change that would make their work more meaningful or more sustainable, and name **one obstacle** to that objective that was **within their circle of control**. This is notwithstanding that they may have been facing many others. This was to match the scope of the programme, which is to focus on individual-level changes. Hence, the obstacles below reflect the design of the programme. This is not a claim that no wider structural obstacles exist.
38. Their immediate objectives fell broadly into three buckets: (1) Creating more space and time for what they like to do outside of work; (2) Working more effectively; and (3) Having a steadier inner state. The obstacles that they named, which stood in the way of their immediate objective, can be grouped into six themes.
39. The six themes are presented here with illustrative quotations drawn only from their coaching sessions. Unlike the earlier themes on philosophies of life and of work, where counts show how widespread a theme is across the cohort, the count here represents the primacy of the obstacle to the participant, rather than the prevalence of that obstacle across the cohort. In other words, when asked to name an obstacle to their named objective of making work more meaningful or sustainable, this was the foremost obstacle that they were experiencing. The true prevalence of each obstacle is likely higher than the counts suggest as even when the participants were asked to name one obstacle, approximately one-third described a multi-faceted obstacle that straddled more than one theme.

Theme 1: Perfectionism and Unrealistic Expectations (7 of 21)

40. A recurring obstacle across the cohort was the tendency to hold oneself to unrealistic standards of work. Participants described placing immense pressure on themselves to perform flawlessly, give more than optimally required, or to meet self-imposed expectations that were often higher than those imposed by their firms or supervisors. One described this "*as a performance box that just gets bigger and stronger*". Others struggled with a persistent belief that they ought already to know everything expected of them.

“I need the perfect answer before I write things down.”

“I aim for perfection when I work.”

“Being conscientious, I need to meet court deadlines and it has to be a certain standard. Is it the work or am I being overly conscientious?”

“In my whole life, I have [had high expectations of myself] – I need my work to be of a certain standard.”

“My problem is that I have unrealistic expectations of myself. I cannot compare my draft to my boss' draft when [my boss] had [far more] experience. I feel that I have not really pushed myself and that if I were really doing that, I would have been more successful - which sounds really dumb to me now that I am saying that.”

41. These unrealistic expectations of themselves are not just confined to work. They spill into a person's other roles in life. One participant expected themselves to work at full steam, and also give their all in their relational roles and home responsibilities. Such optimised days in fact left them with no margin for themselves, and a sense of lack.

Theme 2: Self-Worth and Self-Perception (6 of 21)

42. For a number of participants, their biggest obstacle was not a lack of ability but the way they perceived themselves. Negative self-talk and self-doubt surfaced repeatedly and in different ways. Some were constrained by the stories they told themselves about their own competence, or by allowing their self-worth to rise and fall with the praises or criticisms of others.

“I am not as smart as most people, I am just bad at my work, I am not as disciplined as I should be.”

“My inner voice tells me that my rate is not fast enough and I have not achieved enough, I am always behind the normal distribution curve.”

“To not ping-pong so much [and let my value turn on positive or negative feedback]. To be in a more median state.”

43. One participant named a lingering shame of not having studied at a prestigious institution, and would still presume poorly of themselves despite being able to “punch at the same weight” as their peers who had.
44. For some, this was not unrelated to the perfectionism described above viz. an excessive need to prove themselves as though meeting a high enough standard might finally settle the question of whether they were enough.

Theme 3: Emotions and Avoidance (5 of 21)

45. For these participants the challenge was not one of not knowing what to do, but in regulating their emotions when things go wrong or when they feel overwhelmed by the weight of all their many tasks. This resulted in procrastination and avoidance, and oftentimes, they were further weighed down by a critical inner script.

“It is the emotions and the daily grind of a 1001 things that I have to do that really gets to me.”

“My obstacle is the feeling that I do not have time.”

Theme 4: Navigation of Others (5 of 21)

46. “Being misunderstood” and the instinctive reaction “to fight” when things go wrong, as well as the struggle to read managers or clients were some of the obstacles named under this theme. One participant explained that this was about learning how to work with the “40% of the OK people” who are neither naturally easy for them to work with nor impossible to work with. Navigating the comparison environment of gossip, LinkedIn scrolling and colleagues comparing their pay packages was also named by a participant who felt that they were “easily affected by comparison”.

Theme 5: Lack of Personal Boundaries and Management of Time (4 of 21)

47. Some participants expressed a desire for greater control over their time and attention. They wanted to do meaningful work, maintain important relationships, pursue interests outside of work, and sustain their careers over the long term. Yet they struggled to establish boundaries, delegate effectively, say “no” to competing demands, or protect time for what they personally valued most until a “one-hour takes four”.

“Being [nice] means doing the work for them.”

“Delegation would make my life easier — but I do not find the time to sit down and see what needs to be delegated.”

Theme 6: Lack of Role-models who Work Sustainably (3 of 21)

48. The participants here want visible evidence that working sustainably is possible. They want to see kindness in action and people in the profession who have achieved a good balance in life. As one of them puts it:

“I don’t see a model I can emulate and that cuts off my vision to achieving longevity at work. I don’t see how my ideal of having a balanced life outside of work

can play out when I look at the people in my firm and their need to be constantly online.”

VI. Posture-Shifts Matter

49. Having identified both their sources of meaning and the obstacles that stood in the way of living them out, participants were invited to identify a posture-shift. This is the key of sustained change.
50. A posture-shift is more than a change in behaviour. It is a shift in the underlying disposition, belief or a default way of seeing themselves in relation to a situation. Participants were therefore encouraged not merely to identify actions but also to examine the assumptions, narratives and default responses that caused them to be “stuck” in the first place. Once identified, that posture-shift was translated into a small and practical micro-action that could be repeated consistently.
51. All 21 participants identified a posture-shift that was individualised and meaningful to them. Several are so personal that reporting them in more detail would not honour the trust in which they were shared. Hence, what is discussed here in aggregate are the coaching observations of what made their shifts effective and the features that most of them took. Thus, unlike the earlier sections, no counts accompany the features that are being described.

Posture-shifts Must be Self-discovered and not Prescribed

52. The most effective posture-shift is not prescribed but discovered and articulated by the individuals themselves. Hence, the value in an individualised coaching process that is focused on facilitating self-realisation. Rather than prescribing solutions, the coaching conversations helped participants arrive at a shift in posture that enabled them to see themselves, their work and their circumstances from a different perspective. It was this shift that unlocked forward movement towards their objective.

Shifts Rooted in Identity Produced the Most Enduring Change

53. Not all posture-shifts are equal. The deepest and most enduring ones are often rooted in identity. Participants who experienced the most significant breakthroughs were not changing what they did, but how they saw themselves at their core.
54. For one participant, this shift at the core helped them avoid over-indulging their time in perfecting their work, leaving time instead to tend to the other relationships in their life that mattered, relationships which would, in turn, fuel their ability to work. For

another, the fundamental shift was moving from deriving their worth from the approval of others to grounding their identity in something deeper and more enduring.

From Perfection to Permission

55. This posture-shift included granting of permission to oneself to stop when the day's necessary work was done and treating anything further as a bonus to be chosen only *"if I am energised to do it"*. Or, instead of needing to be fully prepared before they took action, or consistently in control, they gave themselves permission to stop and rest, permission to make decisions without exhaustive analysis, and permission to accept that life and work are often messy.

"All my options were good ones; the task is simply to bite the bullet and decide."

"From trying to optimise to giving myself grace to do life and enjoy the messes of life."

From Wrestling to Acceptance

56. This took the form of accepting themselves as they are : embracing the talents they do have while also accepting their own limitations. Instead of producing complacency, this acceptance helped to reduce anxiety and created greater freedom to act.

"Instead of viewing myself as inadequate, I now accept that I am competent and simply learning, just like everyone else."

"Quiet mastery – where I know I did my best and this is the best I am willing to give, and that is okay."

From Self to Service

57. A number of participants found that their obstacles diminished when their attention shifted away from themselves and towards serving others. For one participant who tended to "do the work" for others, this gave them a new approach to delegation.

"Delegation is teaching others, not simply moving work off my own desk."

From Dependence to Ownership

58. The final movement was from dependence to ownership. Participants increasingly saw themselves not as passive recipients of circumstances but as owning their work, time, relationships and careers. From the more junior lawyer who felt a lack of mentoring on *"how to build the book"*, to the more senior lawyer, who similarly felt the lack of guidance on *"how to BD"*, the coaching helped shift them from being

dependent on receiving this guidance to owning their own development. One of them reported that this posture-shift helped them to bring in their first client.

59. In a similar vein, two of the three participants who lamented the lack of a role-model had, independent of each other, decided that instead of waiting for role models, they would grow into that role model.

"My realisation is that if I cannot find a role-model, I can learn from negative examples of what I do not want to be and I can figure out for myself the person I want to be instead of looking for an abstract concept of a role-model."

VII. Role of Micro-Actions

60. Whilst posture-shifts provided the foundation for change, micro-actions provided a practical means of reinforcing those new ways of thinking. The micro-actions identified by participants were intentionally small, concrete and repeatable. This gave them the best chance of being practised consistently in the midst of their demanding professional lives.

61. They fall broadly into the following buckets:

- a. **Starting small.** Actions that reduce the friction of beginning e.g. one pomodoro⁷ cycle in week one, building to two; or a five-minute timer to start the plan that keeps being deferred accompanied by an internal phrase to “just do the 5 minutes”.
- b. **Scripts for the inner voice.** The largest bucket, and the direct answer to the inner critic. Participants prepared short phrases to be spoken at the very moments the critic usually speaks. For example, every inner comparison, one participant would say “*I am playing a different game*”. For another participant, instead of self-reproach, they will remind themselves that “*I have done my best with what I have*”.
- c. **Pauses.** These function as a circuit-breaker between their trigger and habitual response. Some examples, include a one-minute pause to pray or breathe at the point of feeling overwhelmed; picturing the person before responding; taking a walk to regain perspective; or what one participant termed a “*purposeful pause*” on receiving a task to think about what the giver wants.

⁷ A single 25-minute focused work interval followed by a short break, from Francesco Cirillo's Pomodoro Technique.

- d. **Boundaries.** To protect time and attention: switching their status to "offline" on internal messaging platforms after working hours even though they were still working online, or during protected blocks of focused work; or preserving rest time by not checking emails on Sunday mornings.
 - e. **Rhythms.** A file catch-up after each significant event; 15 minutes the night before to plan the next day by three principles — know what needs to be done, do not pack the day too fully, and finish what was planned; and deliberate space for rest or exercise at whatever intensity the day allows. The rhythms developed had to be personally meaningful to each participant. For one participant, this meant making “Monday my consolidation day-” to consolidate the week's priorities and delegate work appropriately, a practice which they reported to be personally effective for them.
62. An interesting observation emerged from participants' reflections on the programme. Several reported that once the posture-shift had occurred, the accompanying micro-action became less significant. In some cases, participants acknowledged that they had not consistently carried out the micro-action, yet nevertheless experienced meaningful change because the underlying posture had already shifted. The mindset change itself altered how they approached their work, relationships and decisions.
63. This suggests that the true engine of change was not the micro-action in isolation but the posture-shift that preceded it. The micro-action provided a practical means of reinforcing a new way of thinking, but it was the change in their underlying disposition that gave rise to different choices and behaviours over time.

VIII. Programme's Reception and Impact of Coaching

Impact of the Programme

64. The post-programme questionnaire showed that participants consistently perceived the programme as having a positive effect on their growth and well-being, while also helping them take practical steps towards both a more sustainable legal career and work they found meaningful. Supporting this, participants were asked to rate the programme's effect on them, on a five-point scale. On the statement “*Overall, being on the programme facilitated my growth and/or sense of well-being,*” every participant rated 4 or 5 (with a median of 5). On being helped to “*take concrete steps towards a sustainable legal career,*” 20 of 21 rated 4 or 5 (median 5). On “*concrete steps to do some things which I find meaningful at work,*” 15 of 21 rated 4 or 5 (median 4).

Impact of Coaching

65. That same post-programme questionnaire also showed that coaching played a critical role within the programme. The participants reported substantial gains in clarity regarding their philosophies of life and of work, purpose for working as lawyers, understanding of obstacles to sustainability, and awareness of posture-shifts and micro-actions.
66. When participants were also asked which aspects of the programme helped them clarify each of the above domains, coaching was the single most frequently endorsed helpful factor in every domain: by 20 of 21 for the work on philosophy and purpose, 20 of 21 for the work on obstacles, and 18 of 21 for the posture-shifts and micro-actions. Sharing by the facilitators came next (18, 18 and 12 respectively), followed by individual reflection (17, 14 and 13) and intentionality at implementation (17, 9 and 9); group discussion (12, 9 and 7), panel sharing (12, 11 and 8) and journalling (6, 3 and 3).
67. Sharing by facilitators and individual reflection were the next most commonly cited, though their endorsement rate dropped noticeably for the posture-shifts domain, where participants more often singled out coaching specifically as the mechanism that helped them move from a general concept to a personal, actionable one.
68. Qualitative responses suggest that participants valued coaching because it enabled them to personalise insights arising from the programme, examine assumptions, articulate posture-shifts, and identify practical actions that were relevant to their own circumstances.

"The coaching sessions helped me breakthrough to understand why I feel the way I do, which I think was the real turning point in figuring out how to change my mindset and approach life / work with a different mentality."

"The coaching sessions were also amazing. There were quite a few blind spots uncovered and insights gained."

"The coaching sessions - which were largely self-directed, allowed us to pause, reflect, and actualise our thoughts, and emotions - with discernible steps that we could take."

Coaching as Part of a Holistic Programme

69. Whilst coaching may have consistently emerged as the most frequently cited programme component for what helped the participants, the effectiveness of the coaching component was because of the multiple programme elements and the

broader programme design, which was a collaboration between the Principal Investigator and the Coach, that made meaningful and deep coaching possible.

70. In particular, the programme was intentionally structured to create an environment in which participants, many of whom entered the programme as complete strangers, could engage in unusually candid reflection and discussion about their professional lives than would ordinarily be possible. From the outset, significant attention was therefore given to creating psychological safety and trust between the participants, thus allowing the coaching conversations to delve into deeper and vulnerable areas.

"Coaching was the most helpful as this was personal. That said, I realise I drew heavily from the panel and group sharing during coaching."

IX. Some Coaching Insights

71. Having had the privilege of coaching 21 lawyers on the same issue, and having practised law for two decades before becoming a coach, I offer the following observations drawn from both the coaching conversations and my experience of legal practice.

What Makes Can Break – It Cuts Both Ways

72. What makes these lawyers succeed is also the very thing that strains them: their internal drive towards excellence and their core legal skill of critique. Lawyers are trained and rewarded for their incisive ability to be critical, whether this would be to find weakness in an opposing counsel's case or to identify deficiencies in contracts, and they work in environments where excellence is prized. When this faculty is turned inwards and applied to one's work or worth, it can leave one feeling like his or her work is never good enough, or perhaps that he or she is not enough.

We are More Alike Than we Realise

73. Taking a step back and viewing the cohort as a whole, we see a thread of similarity that runs through the participants' convictions about what makes life, work and challenges meaningful. Most long to do meaningful work that makes a positive difference to others. They want to be able to do that well whilst balancing work, leisure, and the day-to-day responsibilities of their everyday lives at home and at work. This applies regardless of their PQE, abilities, or home circumstances. This desire holds true for them whether they are single or married, parents or "pawrents", sandwiched between generations or free of such pressures. As one participant puts it after the programme:

“This opened my eyes to see that at the core, as lawyers we are all very much alike and human. There is a community out there and I feel less stuck in having to suffer alone.”

What Lawyers Really Want

74. The coaching conversations reveal a deep desire in the participants to do more than just cope with life. They seek to manage well the competing facets and demands of life. The ability to manage well their lives, their time and their priorities is what makes their work sustainable and meaningful. However, at times, these convictions did not translate into practice for the variety of reasons outlined above. Notably, this was true even of participants who appeared to possess considerable personal capacity. This shows that possessing greater capacity does not necessarily result in a more sustainable way of working.
75. This tension in actualising what lawyers really want is aptly summarised by a participant after listening to other participants at the Retreat:

“It is very hard to leave work at the door – even when out of the office. It is striking for me that everyone wants to leave work at a decent time – to have time with the family, enjoy a nice dinner with friends – while also being able to be competent and good at their work for clients and also being able to compartmentalise and say, “7pm -8pm. That is the end of the work day.”

X. Key Recommendations

“There is a soul-deep tiredness inside of us.”

- from a journal entry of a participant who likes the practice of law and would like to be able to “stay in the game”.

76. The participant named what much of the empirical data presented in this Coaching Report points to and the recommendations that follow address this.

Recommendation #1 – Create Margins for the Profession

77. If the root cause of unsustainability is a “deep-soul tiredness”, the answer is not in acquiring more money, promotion or titles. In fact, some of the participants specifically eschewed that because of the even greater demands that these bring. Instead, the profession as a whole needs to create margins for lawyers so they have breathing space to actualise what is meaningful to them, and which aids the

sustainability of their practice. Even muscles cannot remain under constant tension if they are to function effectively. As every lawyer will know “*nemo dat quod non habet*” – we cannot give of what we do not have.

“It was only after the coaching that I learnt that without giving myself space and give, then I could not really, truly, give/do well at work. Because I was rushing and reacting but not really taking the time to be with it and to respond. I needed the coaching to help me to identify them so that I could then take steps to fix it/do better.”

78. Lawyers however do not practise in isolation. They are impacted by the attitudes and expectations of their immediate superiors and their firm’s culture. The firms, in turn, are subjected to the environment of the larger legal ecosystem. A sustainable legal profession is therefore not be built by changing structures alone, nor by changing individuals alone. It requires structural changes in the entire ecosystem that support healthier ways of working, as well as individuals who have a renewed appreciation of the meaning of their work and their professional identity. The two must go hand in hand to make a sustained and meaningful difference to the legal profession as a whole.

79. The micro-actions participants developed, such as turning off notifications on Sunday mornings or protecting time-blocks of focused work, can only be sustained within a surrounding culture that respects them. Sustainable practice cannot depend on individual discipline alone. An example of a positive initiative was a firm-wide practice of holding no internal meetings on Mondays, thereby creating protected time for lawyers to plan, prioritise and begin the week well.

Recommendation #2 - Invest in Coaching that Works at Shifting Posture

80. If margins are necessary for sustainable practice, coaching is one means by which individual lawyers can build and hold them. For lawyers so inclined, coaching sessions offer protected time and space to step back from work to make sense of where they are, and to address their personal obstacles to working more sustainably.

81. The case of coaching specifically, rather than other interventions, rests on what this cohort’s experience showed. The personal obstacles named by the participants are not those addressed by skills training or a performance review. What helped was a change in how each participant viewed himself or herself in relation to that obstacle. The perspective changes that held most firmly were those grounded in posture-shifts that were drawn from the participant’s deepest sources of meaning. For those participants, the circumstances often remained the same, yet their approach to the circumstances had been transformed.

82. Work of this kind requires coaching, where the participant feel safe enough to unmask their professional persona and examine what lies beneath it. This is consistent with the participants rating individual coaching as the element of the programme that helped them the most.

83. Attrition carries significant costs for firms, and coaching offers a practical opportunity to redirect some of those costs to prevention. Firms can provide funding for coaching carried out either through organisational programmes or individual coaching and allow- lawyers to have access to coaching in the form that best meets their needs.

Recommendation #3 – Foster Meaningful Communities with Visible Exemplars of Sustainable Practice

84. *Isolation*. Sustainable practice is difficult in isolation. The disruption caused by the COVID years meant that, for some participants, the *Staying in the Game* community was their first meaningful professional community. It was a place where they felt heard and understood, and where their struggles were recognised as a normal part of professional growth. The participants' own words capture this:

"[The Staying in the Game programme] has also encouraged and refreshed me - this once weary and lonely legal pilgrim."

"It helped me realise that many members of our community are struggling with small obstacles in their career too, and because of my awareness of the wider community, I felt that my struggle is simply a growing pain which professionals go through and not just my personal [struggle]."

85. The findings suggest that lawyers need communities in which they can experience a sense of belonging⁸, share a common purpose, and feel at ease sharing stories of how they overcame their struggles. Such communities provide not only support and encouragement but also perspectives that would help lawyers sustain their practice.

86. These communities need not be confined to the workplace or even the legal profession. Many participants drew meaning, resilience, and support from communities beyond their professional lives. The recommendation, therefore, is not that firms manufacture community, but that they intentionally cultivate opportunities for connection within the workplace while also protecting the margins that enable

⁸ Emily Esfahani Smith. (2017). *The Power of Meaning: Crafting a Life That Matters*. Crown. Smith proposes four pillars of meaning: belonging (relationships in which one is valued for who one is), purpose (a stable, far-reaching goal that organises one's life and involves contributing to others), storytelling (the narrative one constructs to make sense of one's experiences), and transcendence (experiences that lift one beyond the everyday self, such as awe, nature, or spiritual practice).

lawyers to sustain the relationships and communities outside of work that are equally important to their long-term well-being and sustainable practice.

87. *Visible Exemplars*. Sustainable practice is also difficult to imagine without examples. Three of the 21 participants expressed a desire to see sustainable legal practice modelled by those ahead of them. While they aspired to practise differently, they often struggled to identify more senior lawyers who appeared to embody that possibility. Yet, the programme, through its panels of exemplars and peers, suggested that such persons do exist, although they - may be the quieter and less visible members of the profession. Participants found comfort and company not only from the stories of the panellists but also from one another. Therefore, sustainable practice, the programme suggests, is modelled horizontally as well as vertically.
88. This is the reason the programme included an accountability coffee challenge, encouraging participants to seek out mentors/exemplars and peers beyond the formal coaching sessions. Many described the programme as providing the "perfect excuse" to arrange coffee with someone they admired. Several also admitted their reluctance to do so stemmed from the common assumption that more senior lawyers would be too busy or unwilling to make time for them.
89. Yet the results of the coffee challenge suggested otherwise. All 11 participants who took up the challenge met with a more senior practitioner or peer and reported benefiting from the conversation. This included one participant who, despite having no prior connection, reached out to a well-known senior practitioner in their area of practice. If these experiences are reflective of the wider profession, it shows that the profession may already be richer in willing mentors⁹ and visible models of sustainable practice than is commonly assumed. What is missing is not exemplars, but the means of finding them.

XI. Conclusion

90. Taken together, these coaching conversations reveal a cohort of lawyers who are reflective and committed to doing meaningful work well. However, by design, the coaching conversations focused on obstacles that were within a participant's circle of control. Many of the structural realities of legal practice still remain outside the scope of these conversations. These include workload pressures, client demands, manpower constraints, firm culture and economic realities.

⁹ This sits consistently with the empirical data in this Coaching Report that 11 participants identified mentoring as a significant source of meaning in their work.

91. This distinction matters. Whilst meaningful change often begins at the individual level, not every challenge can or should be solved by the individual alone. A lawyer may learn healthier boundaries, but those boundaries cannot always be maintained unless the environment they are in respects them. The sustainability of legal practice depends not only on individual endeavours but also on whether the structures around lawyers and the environment they spend much of their lives interacting with enable them to flourish. As it is true for nature, so it is for the legal ecosystem. What is no longer fruitful must be pruned and what chokes life must be weeded out, so that flourishing can be sustained.

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